Listing of Claims:

1. (Canceled)

2. (Currently amended) The locking mechanism of claim [[1]] 24, in which the wedge forms a continuous rim extending around the body first axial end, the rim having a triangular cross-section.

3. (Currently amended) The locking mechanism of claim [[1]] 24, in which a central portion of the body first axial end defines a cavity that forms the inner engagement surface of the wedge.

4. (Original) The locking mechanism of claim 3, in which the cavity has a cone shape.

5. (Original) The locking mechanism of claim 4, in which the cone has a vertex angle of approximately 120 degrees.

6. (Currently amended) The locking mechanism of claim [[1]] 24, in which the wedge deforms radially outward as the insertion force is applied to the male member.

7. (Currently amended) The locking mechanism of claim [[1]] 24, in which the male member, the female member, and the body are all formed of a similar material.

8. (Currently amended) The locking mechanism of claim [[1]] 24, in which the material is a 300 series stainless steel.

9 (Currently amended) A locking assembly comprising:

a first connection member defining an insertion end formed with male threads;

a second connection member defining an aperture formed with female threads complementary to the male threads; and

a locking mechanism having a body extending along an axis, the body defining a generally cylindrical outer side surface sized for insertion into the aperture of the second connection member and having first and second axial ends, a continuous wedge projecting from the first axial end of the body, the wedge having an inner engagement surface engaging the insertion end of the first connection member and a substantially ~~smooth~~ non-threaded outer engagement surface ~~contacting~~ positioned to contact the threaded aperture of the second connection member, the wedge being sufficiently pliant to deflect radially outward in response to an insertion force applied to the first connection member;

wherein, as the male threads of the first connection member are threadably engaged with the female threads of the second connection member by the insertion force, the inner engagement surface engages the insertion end of the first connection member to generate a first friction force between the locking mechanism and the first connection member and the wedge deflects outward so that the outer engagement surface engages the female threads of the second connection member to generate a second friction force between the locking mechanism and the second connection member.

10. (Original) The locking assembly of claim 9, in which the first connection member comprises an extension stem and the second connection member comprises a valve actuator rod.

11. (Original) The locking assembly of claim 9, in which the wedge forms a continuous rim extending around the body first axial end.

12. (Original) The locking assembly of claim 9, in which a central portion of the body first axial end defines a cavity that forms the inner engagement surface of the wedge.

13. (Original) The locking assembly of claim 12, in which the cavity has a cone shape.

14. (Original) The locking assembly of claim 13, in which the cone has a vertex angle of approximately 120 degrees.

15. (Original) The locking assembly of claim 9, in which the locking mechanism, first connection member, and second connection member are all formed of materials having similar hardness and strength.

16. (Original) The locking mechanism of claim 15, in which the locking mechanism, first connection member, and second connection member are all formed of a 300 series stainless steel.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Previously presented) The locking mechanism of claim 23, in which the wedge forms a continuous rim extending around the body first axial end.

19. (Previously presented) The locking mechanism of claim 23, in which a central portion of the body first axial end defines a cavity that forms the inner engagement surface of the wedge.

20. (Previously presented) The locking mechanism of claim 23, in which the cavity has a cone shape.

21. (Previously presented) The locking mechanism of claim 23, in which the cone has a vertex angle of approximately 120 degrees.

22. (Canceled).

23. (Currently amended) A locking mechanism comprising:

a valve actuator rod having a threaded aperture;

an extension stem having a threaded insertion end sized to threadably engage the threaded aperture, the extension stem having a tip and arranged to apply an insertion force to a generally cylindrical body;

the body sized for insertion into the aperture and having a second end facing into the aperture and a first end facing out of the aperture in a position for contact with the tip;

the first end of the body forming a continuous circumferential deflectable wedge with a triangular cross-section, the wedge having a generally conical inner engagement surface disposed inside the wedge and adapted to engage the tip of the extension stem and a non-threaded outer engagement surface adapted to engage the threaded aperture of the valve actuator rod, the deflectable wedge outwardly deflectable against the threaded aperture in response to the insertion force.

24. (New) A locking mechanism for securing a valve stem to an actuator rod, the locking mechanism comprising:

a valve stem extension attachable to the valve stem and having a tip, the valve stem extension having a set of male threads;

a female aperture formed in the actuator rod, the female aperture having a set of internal threads sized to threadably receive the male threads of the valve stem extension;

a generally cylindrical body having a longitudinal axis, the body including a non-threaded outer side surface sized for insertion into the female aperture, a first axial for placement facing out of the aperture, and a second axial end for placement facing into the aperture; and

a wedge formed adjacent the first axial end of the body, the wedge including an inner engagement surface sized to surround and engage the tip of the valve stem extension when the valve stem extension is threaded into the aperture after insertion of the body;

the wedge further including a non-threaded outer engagement surface positioned adjacent the threads of the female aperture, the wedge being sufficiently pliant to deflect radially outward in response to threading the valve stem extension into the female aperture.